

Enjoying holiday feasts and treats? Thank a farmer!

For many people, the holiday season is synonymous with food. From dinners with friends and family to treats at the office, food seems abundant. With all the eating going on it is appropriate to take some time to consider where our food comes from, starting with what we know about farming in our region.



According to the [2016 Census of Agriculture](#), approximately 155,000 hectares of land are reported as being farmed in the Columbia-Basin Boundary region—substantially less than the 391,000 hectares of Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) land in the Kootenay ALC Panel. Though these two regions do not share exact borders, these statistics indicate that much of the potential farmland in the region is used for other purposes. The majority of farmed land (71,620 hectares) is in the East Kootenay, followed by the Kootenay Boundary (34,242 hectares), and the Central Kootenay (21,267 hectares), with smaller amounts of land farmed in the northern part of our region. However, if we look at the *number* of farms, most are in the Central Kootenay (537 farms reported), followed by 348 in the East Kootenay, and 272 farms in the Boundary. This illustrates some of the differences in the types of farms across the region, with large numbers of small farms generally in the west and smaller numbers of larger farms in the east.

If we only look at the statistics related to farms and farmland, the story of agriculture in our region is not a particularly positive one. The total amount of land being farmed is decreasing, and is now at levels lower than what we have seen in any of the Agricultural Censuses dating back to 1996. The total number of farms is shrinking as well. The one metric reported by Statistics Canada that is increasing related to farms and agriculture is the age of farmers, with over 61% of our farmers being 55 years or older.

But there is an important story beyond the statistics. Interest in agriculture has been increasing in our region, with food security discussions appearing in many major planning documents beyond the expected agricultural plans, including climate change adaptation plans, economic development plans, poverty reduction strategies, and more. This interest is reflected in past public opinion polls conducted by the RDI as part of its [State of the Basin](#) program. Within the region 89% of respondents made an effort to buy local food.

We also see a number of initiatives focused on providing resources and support related to agriculture, food, and food security. One example is the [Central Kootenay Food Policy Council](#), which was established in 2016 to provide a discussion forum and enable programs related to food issues and opportunities. Abra Brynne, coordinator for the Central Kootenay Food Policy Council notes that "Policy is a tool of government that, ideally, enables us all to live together fairly and well. When it comes to food, local government has a limited but effective set of tools to help ensure that our foodshed thrives. The Central Kootenay Food Policy Council is working with our local governments to amend policies where needed so that they better support food production, food access and the reduction of food waste in our region."

Happy holidays and enjoy the food!

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This article is a product of the Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, at Selkirk College. We are a regional research centre with a mandate to support informed decision-making by Columbia Basin-Boundary communities through the provision of information, applied research and related outreach and extension support. Visit www.cbrdi.ca for more information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Revy. Set. Grow!

The Young Agrarians and Community Connections present a weekend of farm-focused events aimed at building a local food system.

When: Saturday January 13 – Sunday January 14, 2018

Where: 600 Campbell Ave, Revelstoke, BC
RSVP [here](#).

More information [here](#).

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Podcast: Communities on Ice

The curling rink plays a central role in many Canadian communities, particularly in rural places. Join the Rural Routes podcast team as they chat with Olympic gold medalist Jamie Korab, researcher Heather Mair, and other curling enthusiasts to discuss sport, wellness, volunteerism, community, and curling.

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